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STRENGTHENING ASEAN'S EXECUTIVE, JUDICIAL, AND LEGISLATIVE NETWORKS



Lao PDR officials at the PROGRESS-supported diplomatic training held in Vientiane in January 2016.

A community of 10 countries, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) boast the world's seventh largest economy with a combined gross domestic product of \$2.4 trillion and a population of over 625 million people. The deepening regional integration that accompanies the formation of the ASEAN Community in 2016 not only presents new opportunities, but also new challenges. The increase in trade and movement of peoples across borders will invariably lead to an increase in cross-border disputes, putting a strain on national legal systems currently ill-equipped to adjudicate across legal systems and jurisdictions.

In order to address these challenges and to recognize the full potential of an integrated ASEAN Community, it is critical to strengthen a shared understanding of the rule of law across the region. A regular exchange of views and best practices among the judiciaries of the ASEAN Member States (AMS) will facilitate common understanding of agreements and treaties within respective jurisdictions. Close collaboration will also foster greater connectivity between judiciary bodies and leaders and strengthen a regional network for sharing legal information and research.

The United States Government, through the ASEAN-U.S. Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development and Security (PROGRESS) project, is supporting ASEAN efforts to strengthen channels for regional cooperation on existing and emerging challenges. Specifically, U.S. support to ASEAN focuses on the following initiatives:

- **Supporting the establishment of a formal ASEAN judicial cooperation framework:** Building upon the commitment of the ASEAN Chief Justices Meeting as stated in the *Boracay Accord* of 2015, the U.S. continues to support cooperation among ASEAN supreme court judges with the overarching objective to build consensus and support for the establishment of a formal ASEAN judicial cooperation framework.
- **Supporting a rules-based ASEAN:** Based upon positive results from the December 2015 seminar on a rules-based ASEAN held in Singapore, the U.S. will continue to support ASEAN efforts to facilitate its transformation into a rules-based institution.
- **Support to the ASEAN Chair:** Similar to the assistance provided to Myanmar in 2014, the U.S. is supporting the 2016 Chairmanship of Lao PDR through provision of training for Ministry of Foreign Affairs diplomatic staff involved in ASEAN affairs and the translation into Lao the ASEAN 2025 Vision, and organizing a potential visit of senior Lao officials to the ASEAN Secretariat.

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